



LONG HAIR

(Northern Cheyenne)



Developed by members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe

Leroy Pine, Sr., Coordinator

Jude Brady

Eva M. Bray

Donna Livingston, Illustrator

Story by Julia Pine

Translated and written by Leroy Pine, Sr.

Joseph Coburn, Director

Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language Development Program

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Developed by the Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language
Development Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory,
300 Southwest Sixth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204

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Contract No. 400-80-0105 with the Educational Equity Group/Multi-
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Printed and bound in the United States of America

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Told by Julia King Fisher-Pine
(Northern Cheyenne)

Julia King Fisher-Pine, a Cheyenne historian, explained to this translator-writer that many different stories have been told about General George Armstrong Custer. She decided to tell what she knows about him. Her own version was told to her by her father and her grandparents. Julia is now eighty-two years old and is still active in body and mind. This is one of her favorite true stories. Having heard similar stories from so many different people, she still remembers the smallest parts of this story in detail.

After a long hard winter, spring came. The flowers bloomed and the birds returned. Everyone in the tribe was happy to see another spring season, and began talking about their next campsite along the Little Big Horn River.

Other tribes began to appear at this campsite, which turned out to be an unusually huge gathering. It was the spring of 1876. No one really knew for sure why there was such a huge gathering, but most of the Cheyennes were having a good time and were very happy to see other tribes. Everyone had some kind of story to tell. Old friends were meeting and new friends were exchanging greetings with one another while warriors told war stories. It turned into a big celebration.

On the night before the Little Big Horn battle, Long Knife, the camp crier, announced, "All you people in camp, beware. You are going to be attacked by soldiers sometime in the morning. Be ready, and be prepared to fight!" He repeated this in several different places around the huge camp.

Warrior King Fisher and the Cheyennes already knew where General Custer had camped that night. They knew about his plan to attack them at Little Big Horn. The Cheyennes thought General Custer made a mistake when he divided his 600 men of the seventh cavalry. He had sent some of the men to circle around and come in from the south. The war chiefs already knew of this strategy.

The next morning, the best warriors with the fastest horses were placed in the front line where they were told to counter-attack the soldiers. These warriors were willing to take a chance, even though some of them only carried a bow and some arrows and maybe a war club. Some, however, were more fortunate. They owned different kinds of rifles. But even they had only limited ammunition for the forthcoming battle.

As the crier had predicted, the battle began early in the morning on June 25, 1876. The crier yelled, "Soldiers are here! Go out there and fight them!" A great commotion began and spread like wildfire among the whole camp. Some warriors

went to fight the soldiers up in the hills. The shooting could be heard somewhere toward the east and south, and it was coming closer. Women began screaming and yelling at children to seek shelter in the bushes or ditches or across the river.

The men began getting ready. Some had just begun to eat breakfast and had to catch their horses and put on war paint. Soon most of them rode off toward the hills to join the others already in the battle.

During the battle, warrior King Fisher's father saw one medicine man who ran in front of the soldiers. The soldiers shot at him from the top of the hill. The medicine man must have had supernatural powers that would ward off bullets. He raised his rifle in the air and then hit the ground with the rifle butt. He started spinning. Lots of soldiers tried hard to shoot him. They only wasted their bullets for he did not fall or appear to be hit.

The soldiers were surrounded and most had been killed. There was dust everywhere and visibility was poor. The Cheyennes had been extra careful not to waste their ammunition. There were arrows by the thousands everywhere. The shooting had died down, except for some sporadic shooting which could still be heard in some places. There were no more soldiers anywhere. The battle was over.

After the dust settled, those who did not participate in the battle came out of hiding one by one. Each family began to search for missing family members and horses. There were a lot of loose horses running around and some could not be caught. Some horses did not calm down until the next day.

Everyone began wondering what would happen next. No one knew if more soldiers were coming to attack them again. Everyone was scared. They did not know what to do. Finally, someone said, "We're safe! We're all right. Do not worry! Calm down! The soldiers have been killed. There are no more soldiers!"

Some Cheyenne parents could hardly wait to find out how many warriors were killed in the battle. The waiting and searching for the wounded began. Those warriors who fought close to camp had already returned. They were reluctant to break the bad news to the parents and relatives of the slain warriors.

Warrior King Fisher's first cousin had been shot in the stomach and had died. It was shocking news. The family was very proud of him because he had died as a hero, but the loss of a very special family member was unbearable to accept at this stage.

Warrior King Fisher could never forget the family mourning period. He had been very close to his beloved cousin. The sadness and hardship was unforgettable. The mourning period and the burial ceremony for his cousin was perhaps the saddest night in his entire life. That night when other warriors were laid to rest in peace, the relatives cried and sang sad songs.

Warrior King Fisher was tired and went to sleep. Later, he was awakened by loud crying. Weeping by his side were his uncle and aunt who had come to embrace him because he was close to their son. He could not help but be emotionally involved. After his uncle and his aunt left, he was awakened again during the early morning hours by repeated bad dreams. As he lay there, he did not know at times if he were dreaming or awake.

Finally, the mourning period ended. After everything returned to normal, it was customary to take part in a victory dance, a celebration, especially in cases where an actual battle has been won by the tribe or band. Honors were paid to each brave warrior.

Warrior King Fisher was proud of his uncles. They fought bravely and lived through one of the greatest battles in Cheyenne history, the battle of Little Big Horn. Warriors like Red-Paint-Head-Gear, Stays Long and Warrior Dark Horse were highly respected for their accomplishments.

Since warrior King Fisher was just a young man when the battle took place, he still had a lot of learning to do. He sought advice and counseling from his uncles from time to time. He looked at all the war souvenirs his uncles had collected. He listened to their different war stories to hear how his uncles had collected their war souvenirs. Sometimes he wished he had been older, so he could have been there with his uncles. Unfortunately, he was born too late.

Approximately a year later, the Cheyennes surrendered because the wise chiefs knew sooner or later they would have to quit fighting. The odds were increasing against them. They took a big chance of being killed after what had happened at Little Big Horn. They were afraid, however, to surrender and become prisoners of war. Some thought the soldiers could not be trusted. (Even General Custer had previously smoked a peace pipe with the Cheyennes, just before the Little Big Horn Battle. Custer had promised not to attack them as long as they were not hostile. One of the chiefs had known Custer could not be trusted. He had watched Custer's body language and had listened carefully to the way he had talked to the chiefs during the smoking ceremony.)

The decision to surrender was difficult. The debating went on until one old lady and a companion rode in with pack horses. She said to the chiefs, "I brought gifts for everyone." She had tobacco, blankets, knives, food and whiskey. She told the chiefs these were from the white soldiers. She had made friends with the soldiers many years ago. She had been captured and had lived with another tribe and the soldiers in peace and harmony. She told the chiefs the soldiers only wanted to make peace. If they would surrender peacefully, they would not be harmed. They would be given horses, guns with which to hunt, food, medicine for the sick, shelter and a safe place to stay.

They surrendered peacefully and became prisoners of the United States. One day they were told that the Great White Chief had ordered them to move south where there was plenty of food. They would have game to hunt and a land they could plant. In the summer of 1878 they were sent to Oklahoma where all Indians were supposed to live. It was their punishment for taking part in Little Big Horn battle.

About a year later, many Cheyennes started getting sick and many died from disease and malnutrition. There were limited rations and they were unaccustomed to the heat. Late that summer, the chiefs decided it would be better to defy the U.S. military authorities and risk death in order to be free, rather than suffer and die slowly.

Many finally escaped under the leadership of Dull Knife (Morning Star) and Little Wolf. Three hundred Northern Cheyenne with only seventy warriors began their long march home. Most of the trip was on foot, fighting and evading 13,000 soldiers all the way. Little Wolf's band and Dull Knife's band split up in Nebraska.

Dull Knife's band was captured in the fall. They were later returned to live in the Indian territory in Oklahoma. Dull Knife's band had lived with the Sioux until they were allowed to join Little Wolf's band. Little Wolf's band had made it back to Montana.

In 1884 an executive order finally set aside a reservation in southeastern Montana for all Northern Cheyennes. The reservation was expanded by another executive order in 1900 to encompass its present boundaries.